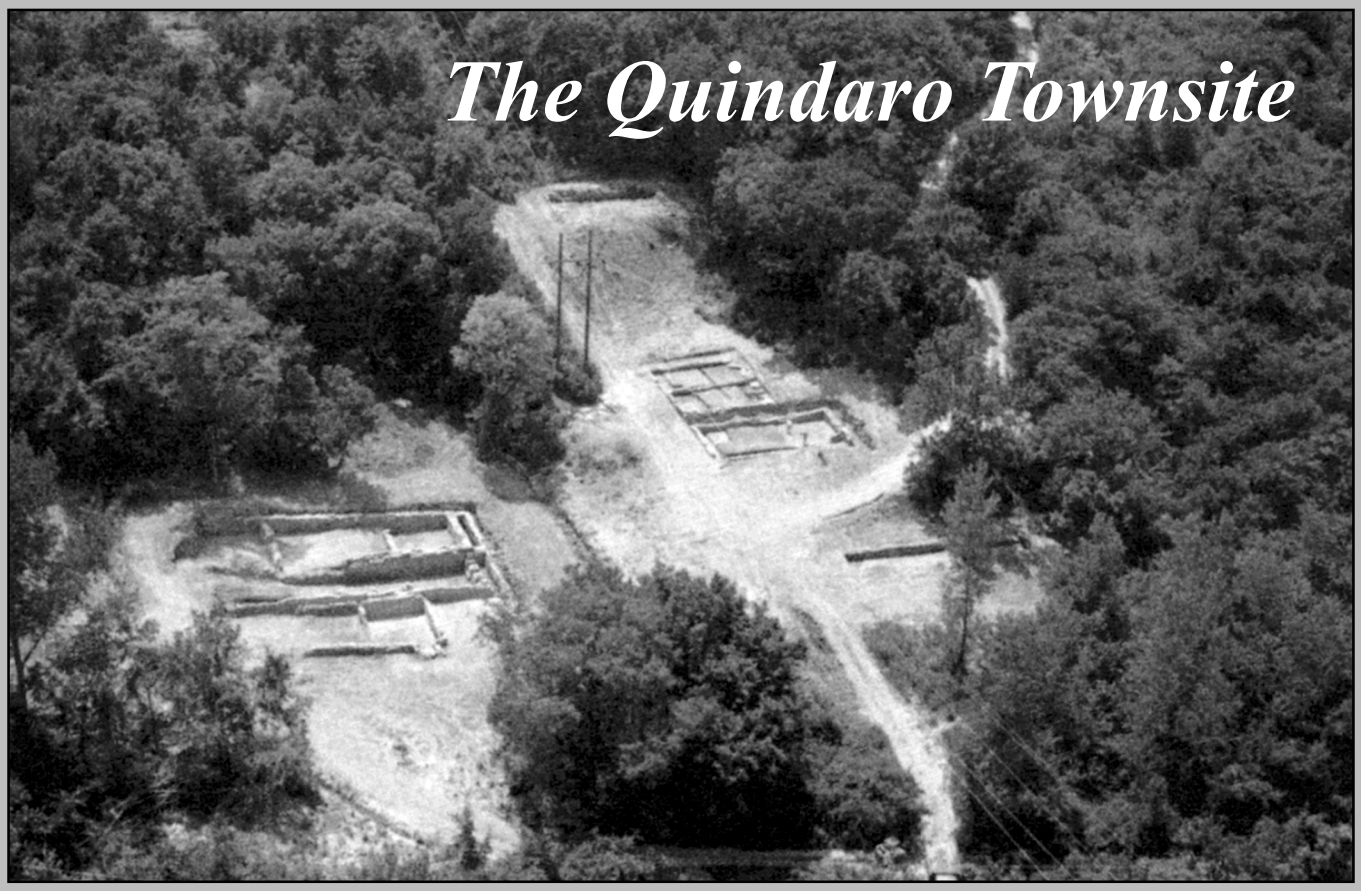
Recognition, At Last

The Quindaro Townsite

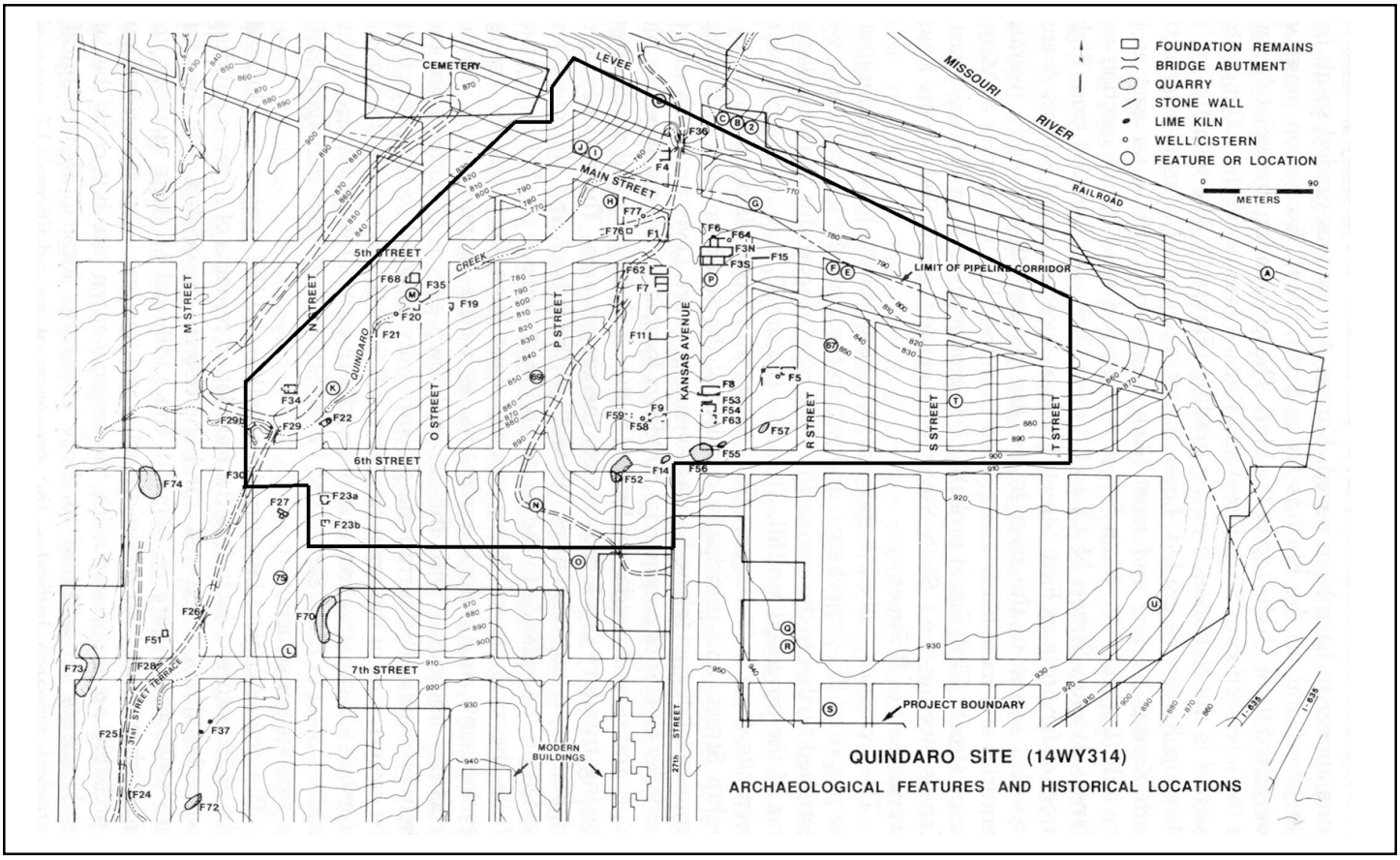


Aerial view (to the south-southwest) of the 1987 excavations along Quindaro's Kansas Avenue (from Schmits 1988:111).

In February of 2002 a nomination to place the Quindaro Townsite (14WY314) on the National Register of Historic Places was presented to the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review. The review board endorsed the proposed nomination, which was forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register by the Kansas State Historic Preservation Officer. In May 2002, the nomination was formally accepted, and Quindaro was officially listed on the National Register, thus ending two decades of research and attempts by various groups to have the townsite's significance formally recognized.

Quindaro has a long and complex history and has been associated with a variety of social or ethnic groups, including Native Americans, European-Americans, and African-Americans. The nomination that placed Quindaro on the National Register only dealt with the site's archeological significance and a small portion of the area that is referred to as Quindaro. National Register requirements mandated this narrow scope and, unfortunately, much of Quindaro's history was not included in the formal nomination. This restricted coverage was necessary because features related to occupations after the 1860s are no longer present or lack integrity.

This article summarizes the archeological importance of the townsite and also outlines later occupations and their importance to the area's history.



Boundaries of the Quindaro townsite nominated to the National Register of Historic Places (base map adapted from Schmits 1988:105).

The Quindaro Townsite (14WY314) is located on the right side of the Missouri River trench in the northern portion of Kansas City, Kansas, approximately 5 miles upstream from the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas rivers. From an archeological standpoint, the area of significance is the portion of the platted townsite that was settled between 1857 and 1862 (see map above). Investigations during the 1980s demonstrated that this portion of Quindaro had a high level of archeological integrity (see photo at left).

As is typical with briefly occupied archeological sites, the significance of Quindaro lies in the fact that it represents an archeological time capsule representative of one of the many Kansas territorial settlements situated along the Missouri River (Schmits 1988:138). After the territorial settlement was abandoned, natural erosion as well as deliberate and indirect cultural destruction of the buildings during the late nineteenth century served to seal the archeological component associated with the site's occupation between 1856 and 1862. These conditions have protected the site from disturbances that can compromise archeological integrity.

One of the primary reasons for Quindaro's significance as an archeological resource lies in the opportunity it provides for reconstructing past lifeways. The integrity of the site's components, the excavated assemblages, and the probable existence of these components in unsampled areas of the site allow researchers to obtain a detailed glimpse of cultural activity at a river port town dating to the Kansas Territorial Period. Reynolds (1984:21) states that archeological research at Quindaro will add details about what life was like in the mid-1800s and could add materially to our knowledge of the early settlement of Kansas.

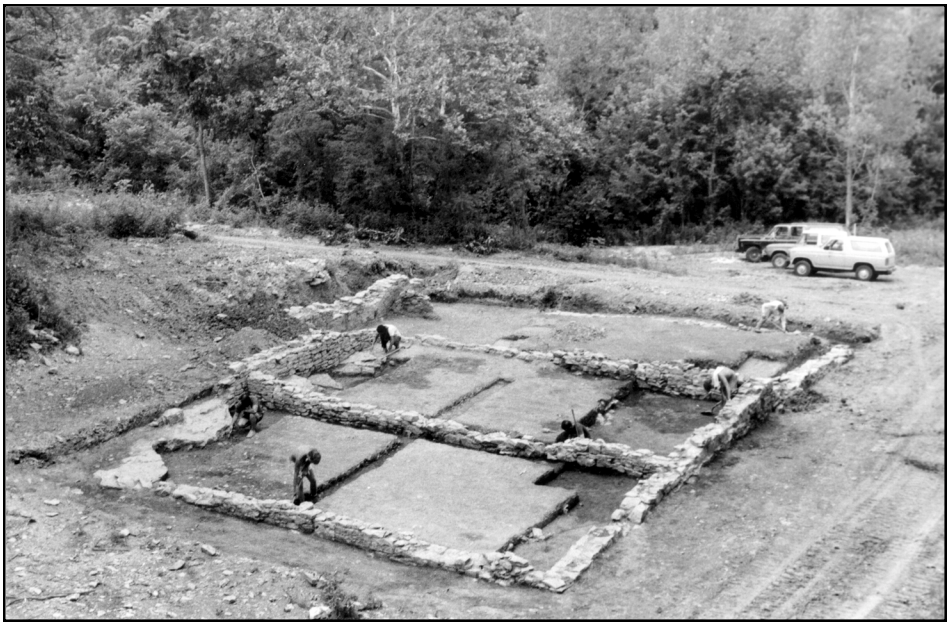
A Diverse Population

It has been documented that Quindaro's inhabitants were culturally and racially diverse. The initial settlers of the townsite included European-Americans and partial-blood Wyandot Indians. As the town grew, African-Americans became part of its population base. Archeological studies of Quindaro will provide the opportunity to examine the lifestyles of these different "ethnic" or cultural groups. In small territorial towns, there was little separation between lower and upper economic strata, thus strengthening the concept of social equality. The question is whether this concept of social equality was just that, a concept, or if it was actually carried out in everyday life. For example, are there differences between the cultural and social classes with respect to their access to trade goods and luxury items? If social differences did exist, and one can assume they did, did they leave behind a recognizable archeological signature? Clues about social standing can be found by analyzing structural elements, site arrangement, and the remains of material culture.

The integrity of Quindaro's archeological deposits allows for questions related to cultural site formation processes to be addressed. Such issues would include building methods, building and abandonment sequences, refuse disposal practices, access to regional and national trade networks, as well as settlement patterning (Robinson 1994).

The Quindaro archeological site has a high degree of integrity, and detailed and diverse cultural assemblages have been recovered during archeological excavations. These assemblages have yet to be analyzed, but will undoubtedly be invaluable in addressing the issues

This article was prepared by Will Banks, archeologist in the state historic preservation office.



View to the northwest of the Upson and Ranzchoff Buildings (from Schmits 1988:116).

View to the southeast of the probable town company office located to the rear of the Quindaro House Hotel (from Schmits 1988:115).

outlined above. Additionally, many areas of the site remain unsampled and there is no evidence to suggest that the archeological components in these areas possess a lesser degree of integrity than those that have been subjected to archeological investigation. Therefore, Quindaro has the potential to substantially contribute to our knowledge of life and cultural processes during Kansas' Territorial Period.

Apart from its archeological significance, Quindaro has a deep and important history. When the Wyandot Indians were forced to move from Ohio to Kansas in July 1843, they hoped to purchase and settle on a portion of the Shawnee Reserve near the town of Westport, Missouri. Such a purchase had already been provided for in a treaty drafted in 1839; however, upon arrival, the Wyandots found the Shawnee unwilling to go through with the agreement. By October, the Wyandots began negotiations with the Delaware for the purchase of a portion of their reserve and had established a ferry across the river in the location of the present Lewis and Clark Viaduct to facilitate relocation. On December 14, 1843, the Wyandots signed an agreement with the Delaware to purchase the eastern end of the Delaware Reserve, a total of 36 sections of land. A small settlement then grew up between the river front and the present Huron Indian Cemetery; within a few years this became known as the town of Wyandott or Wyandott City. This town would eventually become the present Kansas City, Kansas.

A Role in the Free State Movement

In 1854, Senator Stephen A. Douglas introduced a bill to establish the Kansas and Nebraska territories. The Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise that had limited the spread of slavery, instead allowing the question of slavery in the new territories to be settled by "popular sovereignty." This immediately made control of Kansas Territory the goal of competing pro- and anti-slavery forces.

In the fall of 1856, the Quindaro Town Company was formed by an alliance of Wyandots and several individuals from the free-state town of Lawrence with ties to the New England Emigrant Aid Company. The intent was to develop a profitable and safe port of entry into Kansas for free-state settlers, as the established river ports such as Atchison and Leavenworth were largely in pro-slavery hands. Pro-slavery interests were easily able to interrupt the flow of people and goods into Kansas. The Missouri River provided easy transport and was ultimately necessary for trade and the eventual development of Kansas.

At the time that the city charter was first approved in January 1858, Quindaro had a population of 800 (and may have reached 1,200 before decline set in), with nearly 100 private houses built. Businesses included two hotels, a hardware store (Shepherd & Henry at 179 Main Street), three dry goods stores, four groceries, one clothing store (N. Ranzchoff & Co.), two drug stores, two meat markets, two blacksmiths, one wagon shop, six boot and shoe shops, and one livery stable. There were also four doctors, three lawyers, two surveyors, and several carpenters and builders. For almost two years the town boomed, attracting national attention.

As the only free-state river port, from its very beginning Quindaro was rumored to be involved in activities of the Underground Railroad (the well-known and covert operation that helped fugitive slaves escape to freedom in the North prior to the end of the Civil War). However, the known references to such activity suggest that the town did not play a

primary role in the Underground Railroad. Nevertheless, there is undeniable evidence that some residents of Quindaro did participate in activities tied to the Underground Railroad. The best way to describe this participation is that when the opportunity arose to assist fugitive slaves, individuals in the town took advantage of it. This part of Quindaro's history could not be stressed in the National Register nomination since there are no physical features, nor an archeological signature, that can be unequivocally attributed to such activities.

Beginning of the End

Despite having been reincorporated into Wyandotte County in 1859, Quindaro was beginning a decline almost as rapid as its growth. The rough topography was proving to be a major barrier to continued development, a nationwide business depression following the economic panic of 1857 dried up investment capital, a drought that began in June 1859 and lasted almost two years caused great hardship for many, and the triumph of free-state forces in Kansas ended much of Quindaro's basic reason for existence.

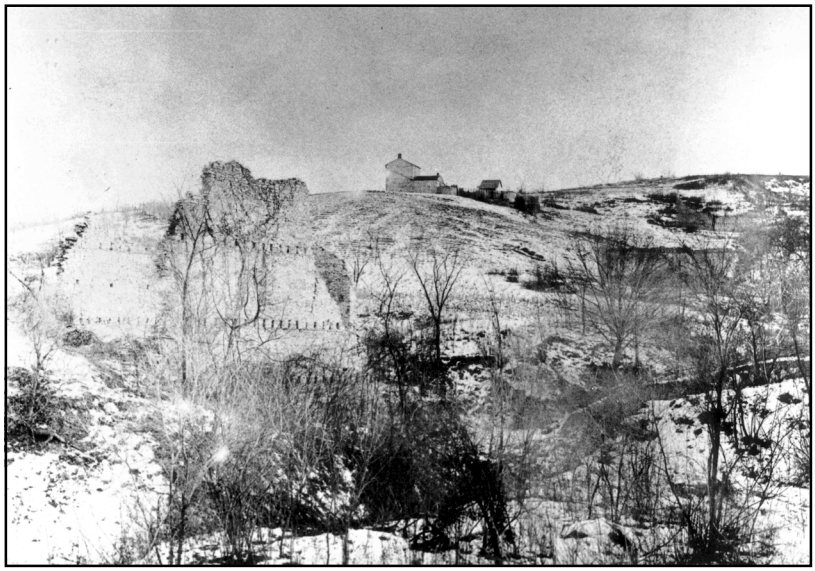
Once the Civil War began in April 1861, much of Quindaro's remaining population began to disappear. With the main part of the town largely deserted, on January 20, 1862, the 9th Kansas Volunteer Infantry under Col. Alton C. Davis was ordered stationed in Quindaro to protect the town from bushwhackers and border raiders. Initially the 700 troops in Davis' regiment were welcomed in the shrunken community and many attended services at the Congregational Church. But as time passed, the largely idle troops reportedly quartered their horses in vacant buildings, pulled down houses for firewood, and generally devastated the community. The troops were finally removed from the town on March 12, 1862, but only after the state legislature had repealed Quindaro's incorporation six days earlier.

By mid-1862, Quindaro had not only ceased to exist legally but also culturally. C. M. Chase visited the abandoned town in 1863 and found only one family living there. He noted that some buildings still remained standing but were all unoccupied. Cottonwood trees had begun to grow in the middle of the streets. After a visit ten years later, Chase noted that the only change in the townsite proper was that the cottonwoods were taller.

A Second Occupation

Throughout the Civil War, but especially after emancipation and Union victory, freed and escaped slaves fled Missouri. Many were drawn toward Quindaro because of its anti-slavery history. They settled on the mostly abandoned town site, particularly in the valley around Quindaro Creek. Individuals and families farmed their own land or worked for the remaining white population. Newcomers to the area lived and farmed near the town in an area that came to be known as "Happy Hollow," to the west of Quindaro. This community served as a transition point from slavery to freedom; however, not much is known about this African-American community. Freedmen occupied the abandoned buildings, farmed, and existed as an isolated, non-urban, unplanned subsistence "village" without any organized social, political, or economic structure. There was no center of commerce and all the buildings were residential.

By 1865 there were 429 African-Americans living in the town site and a group of Quindaro citizens decided to establish a formal school. Soon after, the school became a Freedmen's University, supported through donations and with only two teachers throughout its existence, Eben and Jane Blachly. The Freedmen's University struggled to survive in the troubled mid-1870s. In 1879, the school's trustees took out a mortgage on part of the property of the Freedmen's University in an attempt to keep the school open. After considering selling the school to Park College in Parkville, Missouri, the school was taken over by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1880. The A.M.E. church supported other colleges and since the Freedmen's University was its most western institution, the school was given the name Western University in 1881. The school's educational model was Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, which stressed vocational and industrial training for African-Americans. There was a decade-long delay before Western University began to truly operate as a university in 1890 with an all-black board of trustees and staff.



South-southeast view of the abandoned townsite in the 1880s (from Schmits 1988:103).

By 1904 Western University had added architectural and mechanical drawing, carpentry, cabinet-making, printing, wood-turning, business (stenography and typing), dressmaking, tailoring, music, and agriculture programs. Western University became affiliated with Frederick Douglass Hospital beginning in 1915, when it moved near the college campus.

Medical care was hard to obtain in segregated turn-of-the-century Kansas City. Blacks were only able to seek medical care in the segregated—and inadequate—wards of Kansas City General Hospital. Douglass Hospital was chartered in 1899 after four black men—two doctors, a minister, and a lawyer—met to organize a hospital and nursing school for African-Americans. Douglass Hospital was sponsored, beginning in 1905, by the A.M.E. church and moved to Quindaro Boulevard in 1915. Douglass Hospital was also a training facility and educated students in Western University's nursing program. The hospital continued to serve the black community for nearly fifty more years.

Western University reached the apogee of its success during the 1920s when 400-500 students a year attended the school. However, circumstances began to interfere with the school's

Continued on page 13

Kansans Well Represented at Regional Conference

Cultural Resources Division archeologists Tod Bevitt, Jennifer Epperson, Bob Hoard, Jim Marshall, Randy Thies, and Tim Weston attended the 60th annual Plains Anthropological Conference in Oklahoma City October 23-26. The 2002 conference was hosted by the Oklahoma Archeological Survey and co-sponsored by the Department of Anthropology, Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, and the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oklahoma.

Tod Bevitt and James Marshall represented the KSHS in a symposium entitled "Cultures of the Protohistoric to Historic Transition in the Southern Plains." Donald J. Blakeslee of Wichita State University and Richard Drass of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey organized this session for the purpose of introducing participants to current research directions on the protohistoric archeological complexes present from southern Kansas to northern Texas. Epidemics, warfare, and the introduction of new technologies and new markets made the very late prehistoric and protohistoric periods times of rapid and revolutionary changes that radically transformed native cultures in the region.

Bevitt's paper, "On the Verge of the Protohistoric: The Late Prehistoric Pratt Complex," reviewed the pertinent sites and research on the Late Prehistoric Native American presence in the Pratt vicinity. Bevitt summarized the current understanding of the Pratt complex and offered recommendations for future research necessary for a more complete understanding of the Pratt complex's place in the cultural sequence of Kansas.

In "An Analysis of the Stone Implements of the Lower Walnut Focus," Marshall presented the analysis of stone implements, particularly projectile points, from archeological sites in the Arkansas City area, dating to a 350-year period from A.D. 1350 to 1700. He proposed converting the focus to an archeological phase with four subphases.

Also participating in the symposium were Kansas archeologists Lauren W. Ritterbush and Donna C. Roper from Kansas State University and Donald J. Blakeslee and James N. Gundersen from Wichita State University.

Other Kansas scholars presenting papers at the conference were Ron McCoy from Emporia State University; Dustin Caster and Matthew J. Padilla from Kansas State University; Jeannette Blackmar, Joshua S. Campbell, Jack L. Hofman, William C. Johnson, Roche M. Lindsey, Brad Logan, Rolfe D. Mandel, Shannon Ryan, and Chris Widga from the University of Kansas; David T. Hughes from Wichita State University; and Mark Latham from Burns and McDonnell.

Donna Roper led a roundtable lunch discussion on Plains earthlodges, and KSHS archeologist Martin Stein collaborated with Jack Hofman and Rolfe Mandel on a poster presentation, "Winger: An Early Holocene Bison Bonebed in Southwestern Kansas."

Tim Weston served on the Student Paper Award Committee, as did Mary Adair of the University of Kansas Museum of Anthropology. Nine papers were evaluated in the competition, with the award based on the student's research, written paper, and verbal presentation at the conference.

At the business meeting on Thursday evening, Michael Finnegan, professor and program coordinator of anthropology at Kansas State University, was elected to the Plains Anthropological Society Board of Directors.

The Plains Anthropological Society's Distinguished Service Award was conferred upon Dr. Don G. Wyckoff, associate curator of archeology at the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History and associate professor of anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. Wyckoff was born in Topeka and graduated from Osborne Rural High School. He went on to receive B.A. and M.A. degrees in anthropology from the University of Oklahoma and a Ph.D. from Washington State University. He served as Oklahoma's first State Archeologist and first Director of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey prior to his museum appointment in 1996. KSHS archeologist Virginia Wulfkuhle served on the nomination review committee.

The Friday evening banquet address by Dr. Doug Owsley of the Smithsonian Institution was "Paleo-American Osteology." On Saturday the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History in Norman hosted an open house, and a field trip to the Certain bison kill site in western Oklahoma was offered.

Quindaro Townsite

Continued from pg. 10

mission. In 1924 a severe fire devastated Ward Hall, destroying most of the school's dormitories. The A.M.E. church did not have the money to replace the facilities. Western University officials also quarreled with the A.M.E. church over administrative issues, further complicated by accounting and financial problems in the late 1920s. Student enrollment continuously dropped after the fire that destroyed the dorms. In 1931 only 182 students were enrolled at Western University.

On June 30, 1943, Western University was closed. Douglass Hospital, however, continued to serve the African-American community in Kansas City. In fact, the hospital moved to the unoccupied university campus in 1945 and took over the abandoned Grant Hall. Frederick Douglass Hospital remained open until 1978 when it was closed, an ironic victim of desegregation.

The closure of Douglass Hospital in 1978 brought an end to more than 120 years of Quindaro's existence. Begun as a profit-making antislavery town in late 1856 by enterprising European-Americans, the town site had evolved through more than a century to become an important—and historic—educational and medical center for the African-American population in both the Kansas City area and the Midwest. Quindaro is a uniquely important historic site in the state of Kansas, for it represents a rare combination of Native American, European-American, and African-American culture.

References Cited

Reynolds, John D.
1984 Report of Initial Archeological Inspection of a Proposed Sanitary Landfill Site in Sections 29 and 30, T10S, R25E, Kansas City, Kansas. Archeology Office, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

Robinson, Gary G.
1994 Material Culture and Settlement Pattern Among the Germans in the New World: The View from Frankenmuth, Michigan. In *Spacial Patterning in Historical Archaeology: Selected Studies of Settlement*, edited by Donald W. Linebaugh and Gary G. Robinson, pp. 91–115. King and Queen Press, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Schmits, Larry J.
1988 Quindaro: Kansas Territorial Free-State Port on the Missouri River. *The Missouri Archeologist*, 49:89-145.